

Message Text

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21-12
ACTION EUR-25

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R 121540Z NOV 73
FM AMEMBASSY VALLETTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4942
INFO AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY LONDON

CONFIDENTIAL VALLETTA 2219

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, MT
SUBJ: BISHOP GERADA APPOINTED NUNCIO TO EL SALVADOR
AND GUATEMALA

REF: VALLETTA A-113, JUNE 1, 1973 (NOTAL)

1. BISHOP GERADA, COADJUTOR WITH RIGHT OF SUCCESSION TO OCTOGENARIAN (87) ARCHBISHOP X GONZI, HAS BEEN APPOINTED APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO EL SALVADOR AND GUATEMALA. HIS NEW ASSIGNMENT FOLLOWS MONTHS OF SPECULATION ABOUT A TRANSFER AS RESULT OF HIS ALLEGED ROLE IN DIRECTING CHURCH FUNDS INTO A BANK THAT FAILED AND TO A CANADIAN SPECULATOR WHO ABSCONDED. THE AMOUNT CONCERNED IS SAID TO EXCEED TWO MILLION DOLLARS (SEE REFAIR).

2. GERADA, A MALTESE, HAS BEEN A CONTROVERSIAL FIGURE HERE SINCE HIS ARRIVAL IN 1968. HE WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN MOVING THE CHURCH AWAY FROM PARTISAN POLITICS, AND HIS BEHIND-THE-SCENES EFFORTS ARE CREDITED FOR THE 1969 AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND THE MALTA LABOR PARTY ON MUTUAL NON-INTERFERENCE.

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3. WHILE CONSIDERED A LIBERAL AND PRO-LABOR, GERADA

IS SAID TO HAVE OPPOSED CHURCH REFORM PLANS DEVELOPED BY TWO PAPAL MISSIONS AND AN ACCOUNTING FIRM DESIGNED TO MODERNIZE CHURCH ADMINISTRATION AND TO CENTRALIZE ITS FINANCIAL OPERATIONS, ALLEGEDLY BECAUSE HE WANTED TO AWAIT GONZI'S DEATH SO THAT, AS ARCHBISHOP, HE COULD OVERSEE THE REFORMS. IN SPITE OF HIS PRO-LABOR REPUTATION, IN PRIVATE CONVERSATION GERADA CAN BE INTENSELY HOSTILE TO PRIME MINISTER MINTOFF.

4. GERADA, A PROFESSIONAL VATICAN DIPLOMAT, WAS BORN IN 1920 IN MALTA AND HAS SERVED IN CAIRO, NEW DELHI, DUBLIN, TOKYO, MEXICO AND RWANDA. HE WILL BE THE FIRST PAPAL NUNCIO OF MALTESE NATIONALITY. PRESS REPORTS SAY HE WILL PRESENT CREDENTIALS NEXT MONTH.

5. BIO INFO WILL BE POUCHED.

6. IN VIEW OF GONZI'S AGE AND GERADA'S CONTROVERSIAL TOUR, WE ASSUME THAT HE WILL BE REPLACED.

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